



# A School Leader's Guide to Communicating about No Child Left Behind

The passage of the new federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has already had a tremendous impact on schools and districts in Washington state. By the fall of 2003, school board members, superintendents and principals will have already been exposed to various presentations, journal articles and news stories about the new law. Unfortunately, the general public does not possess this level of knowledge about No Child Left Behind, and that may pose a communications challenge when school begins in the fall.

Parents, community groups, business and the media are all key audiences for public schools. They are also important partners in the educational process. The more the Washington State Learning First Alliance (WSLFA) can do to inform them about the new federal law, the more support and understanding these groups will have for the good work accomplished each day in classrooms across the state.

The materials included in this toolkit are designed for use by superintendents, principals, district communication officers, teacher leaders and school board members in communicating about the new federal law. These officials are often the first to respond to media inquiries.

Washington's state's work on education policy and practices are reflected in these materials. However, WSLFA members are encouraged to personalize these documents to reflect the goals and challenges of their individual organizations. This packet includes:

- Talking Points for School Leaders
- Strategies for Talking about AYP
- NCLB Key Provisions and Timelines
- NCLB Reporting Timelines
- Tips for Talking with the Media
- Communications Tips for Superintendents
- Communications Tips for Principals
- Questions and Answers for School Leaders
- Tough Q&A
- Words and Terms to Know

No Child Left Behind is a controversial measure with supporters and critics on both sides. The materials presented here are not intended to be persuasive on the issues. They have been created to help the WSLFA and its members communicate with key audiences about important provisions of the law, and its effects on the school community.

For more information on the No Child Left Behind Act, visit the National Learning First Alliance Web site at [www.learningfirst.org/](http://www.learningfirst.org/).

# Talking Points for School Leaders

These talking points are designed for school leaders to use in discussing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act with school staff, parents, community groups and the media.

## How is NCLB supposed to help schools improve?

- It aims to reinforce the work we are already doing to set high standards for our students.
- It sets high expectations for all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, family background and/or disability.
- It aims to get all students meeting academic standards and encourages them to reach even higher.
- It emphasizes reading and mathematics.
- The law requires that test results be reported separately for specifically identified sub-groups of students. These subgroups are: various racial and ethnic groups (White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American), economically disadvantaged students, students whose first language is not English (ELL), and students with disabilities.
- It helps us to better focus our efforts on those students most in need of assistance.
- The law requires each state to set specific goals for student achievement. In Washington state, we have created the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and aligned our state test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, to these standards.
- A school makes “Adequate Yearly Progress” – or AYP – when students meet or exceed academic targets. If schools don’t make AYP for two or more years, they are classified as “schools in need of improvement.”
- If Title I schools do not make AYP for two years in a row, parents are given a number of options, including transferring their children to another school within the school district. After three years, parents may access supplemental education services, such as tutoring. The school would cover the cost of these options.
- Every child deserves an excellent teacher, and the law requires that by the 2005 – 2006 school year, every classroom must have a highly qualified teacher in it. This means teachers must be licensed by the state, fully certified and able to demonstrate competence in the subjects they teach.
- Paraprofessionals working in Title I programs or schools must meet new requirements. Beginning this year, all newly hired paraprofessionals must have two years of college or an associate’s degree, and they must demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist with reading, writing and mathematics through a formal state or local assessment. Currently employed paraprofessionals have until 2006 to meet these requirements.

### **What are some of the challenges in meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind?**

- NCLB requires that every student across the country achieve state standards in reading and mathematics by 2014. This is a very ambitious goal with a very tight timetable – but it is the right goal.
- Because test results must be reported separately for all groups in the school, if even one group falls below the AYP goal, the school will not be counted as making AYP for that year – even if all the other student groups meet the goal.
- Different students learn in different ways and at different rates, and we must accommodate those differences. We must hold all students to high standards, while recognizing that all will not progress at the same rate. And we must make appropriate provisions for those who are struggling to catch up.
- Unfortunately, the law does not reward progress. Some schools will make outstanding progress and still not meet the AYP goal. It's very important to recognize and applaud the good work going on in those schools, at the same time we help them move up.
- Schools that don't make AYP for two consecutive years are "in need of improvement." Virtually every school can improve, even those at the top, but some need to improve more than others.
- What does it mean to be a school "in need of improvement"? It means that we have to work harder and take specific steps to help that school. This could involve new reading or math programs, more after-school assistance, new curricula or teacher training, depending on students' needs. It does not mean that drastic changes will be made without parents knowing about them or having input on them.
- Helping schools in need of improvement will take resources, but, in fact, we don't expect to get a lot of new resources. This means we will have to do the best we can with what we have, targeting our resources as carefully as possible to the areas of greatest need.
- Your children are in good hands. First of all, they have great families. Second, we have many talented, well-qualified teachers. Many of them are outstanding, even though some – technically – may not meet the federal law's definition of "highly qualified." Our challenge will be to keep our outstanding teachers, to see that teachers not yet meeting this requirement get the training or certification they need and to recruit new highly qualified teachers.

### **How can this law help us build on our school's success?**

- Before we turn to test scores, we need to take just a minute to highlight some significant events in our school this year. Most people understand very well that while test scores are very important, they don't capture everything that goes on in school.
  - INSERT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS HERE – increased promotion/graduation rates; awards received by the school, teachers or students; decreased dropout rates; reduced class size; fewer suspensions; new course offerings or curriculum work; new programs or grants; parent or community involvement, etc.
- Our parents play a crucial role in our schools. They are invaluable assets to our schools and to their children's success in school. Many of you spend time in our schools, providing help and resources that we otherwise would not have. We appreciate you more than you know.
- How did our students do this year?
  - FOR SCHOOLS MEETING AYP GOALS: We're extremely proud that our school has met [or exceeded] the goals that have been set. We know our teachers and students will build on this solid achievement and continue to move ahead.

- FOR SCHOOLS MAKING GOOD PROGRESS BUT STILL NOT MEETING AYP GOALS: Our school has made terrific progress this year, but unfortunately, we still fall short of the AYP goals. We applaud this progress, even as we continue to work hard to move ahead.
- FOR SCHOOLS MEETING AYP WITH AVERAGE SCORES, BUT WITH SUBGROUPS BELOW AYP GOALS: Our school's average score meets the AYP goals, but scores for some specific groups of students did not. This means there are groups of students we are not reaching, and we need to do better by them.
- FOR SCHOOLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT OVERALL: Our school has been identified as needing school improvement because [cite specific reasons]. We believe all of our students are up to the task set by NCLB and we are going to do everything that we can to get them there.
  - Here's how we plan to do that: DESCRIBE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS HERE, INCLUDING NEW CURRICULA, NEW PROGRAMS, SMALLER CLASS SIZES, AFTER-SCHOOL HELP, ETC. DO NOT OVERWHELM WITH DETAILS. OFFER 3-5 KEY ITEMS YOU KNOW PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY ARE CONCERNED ABOUT.

### **What can the community do to help?**

- Our school belongs to this community, and we need the help of the entire community to improve it. Everyone has a role to play in helping all of our children to succeed.
- Please think about the organizations and groups you may be involved in, such as your places of worship, your employer, your membership groups and consider ways they might get involved in helping our schools. We can provide suggestions for how they might get involved. We need their help.
- Parents have a special job to do. Yes, we need and would love to have more parents volunteer in our school. And we hope that many of you will get more involved. But we know that's not always possible for busy parents.
- Parent involvement at home is probably the most important kind of parent involvement in education, and there are many things parents can do – and all parents should do – for their children, including:
  - Provide a quiet place to do homework.
  - Make sure they get a good night's sleep and a good breakfast.
  - Take an interest in their schoolwork and talk with them about it.
  - Teach them respect for others and responsibility for their own behavior.

### **Conclusion**

- We have some big challenges ahead of us, as you can see.
- We believe we could do more for our students with more resources, but resources are limited right now. Unless the budget situation improves, we are not likely to have more resources any time soon. But rest assured that we will be doing everything we can to focus the resources we have where they will be used to the greatest good.
- Our doors are open to the community. We invite you in; we want you to be involved. These children are your children, too, and they need your support.
- We want to hear from you – not just about your concerns but also your ideas about how to make our schools better. School improvement must be a two-way conversation between those of us who work in the schools and those who live and work in our community.
- With your help and involvement, we can get all of our students where they need to be.

## Strategies for Talking about NCLB and AYP

### Framing the NCLB issue

- Washington state educators fully support the goals of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and have already begun to implement the major provisions of the new federal law. In fact, Washington's accountability plan was approved this past May with no qualifying conditions. Washington has a plan; now that plan needs to be more broadly communicated to students, educators, parents, the media, and the public.
- We will also continue to support Washington state's tradition of high academic standards and continuous school improvement while implementing NCLB because we believe that **all** children can learn. Having high expectations for our students is not new in Washington. However, the way in which school improvement is measured is different under this new law.
- Since the passage of Washington's education reform legislation in 1993, Washington has paid particular attention to improving elementary schools and this work has paid off; more elementary school students from all walks of life are proving they can meet higher standards.
- We must now give that same attention and support to our middle and high schools. These students will be the first affected by the state's new graduation requirements and the new federal law.
- We anticipate that, as schools, districts, and states across the country begin to implement this new law, some adjustments will be made, including provisions related to our special needs students and English Language Learners (ELL).
- In the end, we must remember the goal of the new law is not about compliance. It is about student achievement.

### Sample Key Messages for the Release of AYP Data

- Washington state is a national model for setting and measuring high achievement standards for its students.
- Our schools and districts are addressing the new NCLB requirements while we continue – in the midst of budget cuts – to do what's best for students.
- We can't do this alone. Maintaining high quality schools is a job for the entire community. We need your help in getting all children to these goals.
- We WANT parent and community input. Please contact your building principal or district office to get involved.

### Communication Strategies for AYP Release

- Take control of your communication early.
- In trying to refute questions from the media about "failing schools" **do not** reiterate—thereby reinforcing—these negative messages. Schools that do not make Adequate Yearly Progress for one year "did not make AYP." Schools that do not make AYP **for two consecutive** years are in "school improvement."
- Identify your target audiences (including staff, parents, community opinion leaders and the media).
- Communicate with these groups often.
- Be proactive – tell your story first.
  - What is your district's plan for assisting schools not making AYP?
  - Here are the challenges/opportunities we face.
  - This is where we're going and we need community support to get there.
- Inform all school employees, unions, PTSA, boosters and other members of the school family so they can also carry this message.
- Remind school employees they are public relations ambassadors for the schools. What they say will affect the public's impression of your school.
- Use your district's communication vehicles to reach audiences, including: newsletters, teacher conferences, memos, notes, lunch menus, open houses, school productions, Web sites, athletic events and cable TV.
- Always include a contact number or e-mail address where people can get more information.

# NCLB Key Provisions and Timelines

The overall goal of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is to have all students achieving state standards by 2014. Between now and 2014, states, districts and schools must take a series of specific steps toward that goal.

Under the new federal law, schools, districts and states must focus intensively on challenging academic standards in reading, mathematics and science and create tests based on them. Washington state is well ahead of many states in this effort because of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The new law also requires accountability for the performance of every child and the guarantee of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. Although all public schools are subject to the NCLB goals and reporting requirements, only schools receiving federal funds under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act will be subject to specific requirements for corrective action.

## Key Provisions

### Testing and Achievement

- By 2005-06, states will test every student annually in reading and mathematics from grades 3-8 and at least once in these subjects in grades 10-12. Washington state already has WASL tests in reading and mathematics in place for students in grades 4, 7 and 10. Additional tests are being developed to meet the requirements of the new law for students in grades 3, 5, 6 and 8.
- By 2007-08, states must test students in science at least once during grades 3-5, grades 6-9 and grades 10-12. The WASL in science has already been developed for grades 5, 8 and 10.
- States set specific scores, known as “proficiency levels,” on their reading and mathematics tests that indicate performance against the standards. These tests reflect Washington state’s academic standards.
- States next set student performance goals – the percentage of students overall and the percentage of students in specific groups expected to achieve proficiency – based on test results from previous years.
- Student performance goals will be raised on a regular schedule between now and 2014 so that by 2014, all students – and all subgroups of students – will be achieving state standards.
- Test scores must be publicly reported, not just for schools, but also for specific groups within schools, including low-income students, those belonging to racial or ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities or limited English proficiency.
- Schools and districts must demonstrate annually that all students – and all groups of students – are meeting state performance goals in order to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- Schools and districts will not be counted as making AYP if any one (or more) of the specific student groups misses the performance goal in either reading or math. It doesn’t matter if the school misses the goal by a little or a lot, or by one group of students or many. All groups must meet the goals for a school to make AYP.
- If schools or districts do not make AYP in the same subject area for two years in a row, they are considered “schools in need of improvement.”
- If “schools in need of improvement” receive Title I funds (federal support for high-poverty schools), special requirements apply to them. These requirements include both financial and technical assistance and the development and implementation of a school improvement plan. In addition, eligible parents will be able

to transfer their children to other public schools that are not “in improvement” or get outside tutoring assistance for them.

- School improvement efforts must focus on programs and approaches that have research evidence demonstrating their effectiveness.
- If schools getting Title I funds continue to fall short of AYP, they will face more extensive changes over the course of several years, including options such as: possible restructuring, state takeover or management by private firms.

### **Teacher and Paraprofessional Quality**

- In every school, all teachers of core academic subjects (i.e. English, language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, history, geography and the arts) must be “highly qualified” by 2005-06.
- Between now and 2005-06, only Title I teachers hired after the first day of the 2002-03 school year must meet these requirements. Other teachers, who don't meet the highly qualified requirements, must take steps to become highly qualified by the end of 2005-06 school year.
- “Highly qualified” teachers must have a bachelor’s degree and hold full state teacher certification. They must also either hold national board certification in the core academic subject(s) they are assigned to teach, **OR** be endorsed in the core academic subject(s) they are assigned to teach.
- States must develop plans to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified by 2005-06, setting measurable goals for districts and schools. States and districts must report annually on their progress and on the percentage of teachers getting professional development to help them become highly qualified.
- Title I schools must notify parents annually that they can request information on their children’s teacher qualifications. Parents in these schools must also be notified if their child is taught for more than four weeks by a teacher who does not meet the federal law’s definition of “highly qualified.”
- Paraprofessionals newly hired after January 2002 must have at least two years of college or an associate’s degree. They must also demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist with reading, writing and mathematics through a formal state or local assessment. Currently employed paraprofessionals have until 2006 to meet these requirements.

### **Overall Timelines**

#### **Starting 2003-04**

States must begin to designate schools that are not making AYP and those that are in school improvement.

#### **By 2005-06**

States must measure progress in reading and mathematics for every student in grades 3-8 and at least once for students in grades 10-12.

#### **By the end of the 2005-06 school year**

States must ensure that all teachers are highly qualified.

#### **By 2007-08**

States must measure student progress in science at least once during each of the following grade spans: 3-5; 6-9; 10-12.

#### **By the end of the 2013-14 school year**

States must demonstrate that all students are meeting the federally required goals for achieving state standards.

### **NCLB Timelines for Schools In Need of Improvement**

After two years, schools in need of improvement that receive Title I funds must take the following steps, proceeding to the next step in the series if they continue to fall short of the AYP goal.

#### **After 2 years**

Schools must adopt 2-year improvement plans, invest in professional development for teachers and give parents the option to transfer their children to a higher-performing public school in the district, with the district using its Title I funds to pay for transportation. Priority transfers will go to the lowest-achieving low-income students.

#### **After 3 years**

Schools continue improvement efforts, fund transportation for public school choice, and give students from low-income families the option of obtaining supplemental education services (i.e. tutoring) from state-approved providers using some of the district's Title I funds.

#### **After 4 years**

Schools continue previous improvement activities and are also subject to "corrective action." Corrective action is taken by the school district and must involve one or more of the following: implementing a new curriculum, replacing school staff, appointing an outside expert as advisor, extending the school day/year, or restructuring the school.

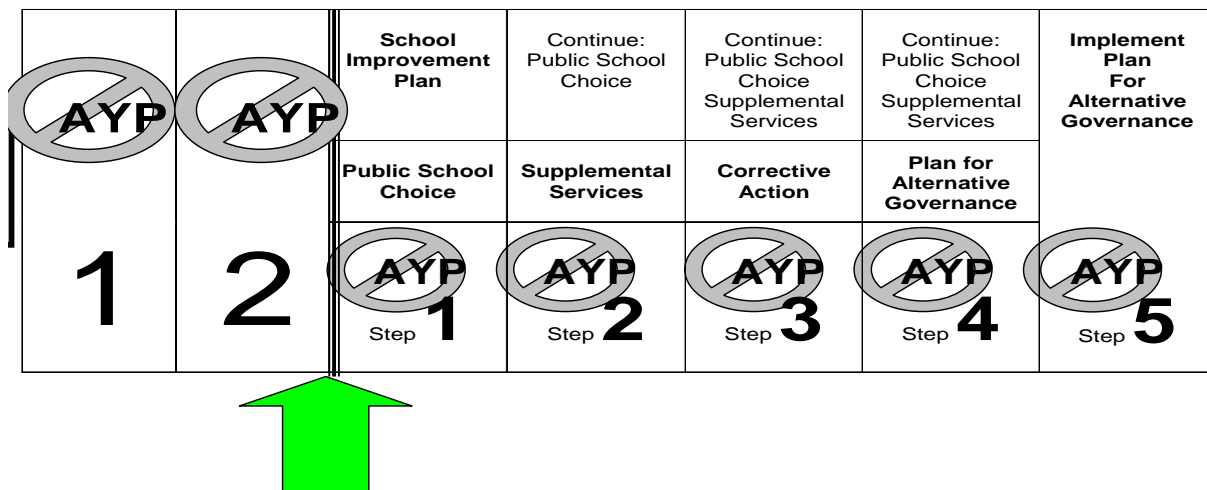
#### **After 5 years**

Schools must plan for restructuring, which may involve replacing staff or contracting with a private firm to manage the school.

#### **After 6 years**

Schools must implement their restructuring plan.

### **AYP TIMELINE FOR SCHOOLS** (Consequences apply only to schools receiving Title I funds)





## NCLB Reporting Timelines

ACTION	DEADLINE	AUDIENCE TO BE NOTIFIED
List of schools in school improvement	Before school starts	All parents and the public
Notify parents about transfer options	Not later than the first day of school following the identification as needing improvement	All parents in Title I schools that have missed making AYP for at least two years. Priority for transfers goes to lowest achieving students from low-income families.
Develop and disseminate school-level report cards with disaggregated test scores, teacher qualifications and other data.	By the beginning of the school year.	All parents and the public. Details about the required information for school, district, and state report cards are available on the OSPI Web site at <a href="http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/">http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/</a>
Notify parents if their child is being taught by a teacher who is not "highly qualified."	At any point during the school year if the child has been taught by a teacher who is not "highly qualified" for 4 or more consecutive weeks.	All parents in Title I schoolwide schools. All parents of students taught by Title I teachers. All teachers in 2005-2006.
Notify parents of their right to transfer out of a school that is "persistently dangerous."	Schools must be identified in time for parents to be notified at least 14 days before the beginning of the school year.	All parents in Title I schools.
Notify parents of their right to participate in developing/revising school improvement plans of those schools in school improvement.	Not later than three months after being identified.	All parents in Title I schools.
Notify parents about the school-parent compact.	By the first day of school.	All parents in Title I schools.
Notify parents of students identified for participation in or who are participating in a language instruction educational program.	No later than 30 days after the beginning of the school year, or within 2 weeks if identified after the beginning of the school year.	All parents of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in schools using Title I funds to provide language instruction to LEP students.

## Tips for Talking with the Media

### A note about language

**Note:** When speaking with parents, community members and the media, remember that **THERE ARE NO FAILING SCHOOLS**. This is NOT official language being used by anyone at the state or federal level, and every effort needs to be made to correct the use of this language by other educators, members of the media, community leaders and parents. The schools “on the list” are those “in need of improvement.” Do not repeat the term “failing schools” back in responses to questions about “failing schools;” this reinforces the negative language.

### Tips for talking with the media about AYP

- Prepare media packets and include facts, figures and program information about your school or district. Include annual reports and/or other easy-to-understand publications. Have these materials on hand at all times.
- Once you know your school or district’s AYP standing, determine three key points. Prepare related talking points to make sure these messages are concisely and consistently presented to the media.
- Include the school board and school/district staff as part of the communication team and make sure they have access to the talking points so everyone is communicating the same message.
- Hold media interviews in an active program location, not the superintendent’s or principal’s office. Let them see, firsthand, the student-teacher activities that are taking place in your building(s).
- Make sure all the information you share with the media and your various key audiences is factual, straightforward (i.e. no acronyms!) and consistent. Stick to the facts.
- Use language geared toward your target audience. Use analogies or school-based stories to get your message across.
- Respond to your situation only; do not speculate about the results of other schools or districts.
- Answer each question and then be silent. Refrain from embellishing your comments and resist subtle pressure to chat about them.
- Don’t dwell on the problem(s); emphasize what you are doing to improve a given situation.
- If the media uses negative language, do not repeat it in your response. Be mindful of negative buzzwords such as “failing.”
- If a negative question is asked, “bridge” your response to the message you want to convey.
- Remain positive. This is an opportunity to provide clarity about what your school or district does and whom you serve.
- If you have questions about communicating with the media or need assistance, contact the person in your district responsible for media relations, your professional association or the Washington School Public Relations Association at [www.wspra.com](http://www.wspra.com). You can also call OSPI’s Communications Department at 360-725-6014.

## Communication Tips for Superintendents

### Preparing for the release of AYP

Anticipate questions your parents, teachers, school board members, community leaders and local media will ask about your school's performance. Talk with district communications professionals about specific key messages for your district **BEFORE** you get media calls.

### A note about language

When speaking with parents, community members and the media, remember that **THERE ARE NO FAILING SCHOOLS**. This is NOT official language being used by anyone at the state or federal level, and every effort needs to be made to correct the use of this language by other educators, members of the media, community leaders and parents. The schools "on the list" are those "in need of improvement." Do not repeat the term "failing schools" back in responses to questions about "failing schools;" this reinforces the negative language.

### What you should know about your district results:

1. Exactly which (if any) school buildings in your district did not make AYP.
2. How many years in a row did each building not make AYP and in which content areas (reading/math) and for which student subgroups.
3. The required actions necessary for each building.
4. A general knowledge of the current school improvement initiatives going on at each school on the school improvement list.
5. A list of at least 3 strengths for each school on the school improvement list.

### Consider the following in preparing for media attention related to AYP:

- Remember that extensive media coverage of the WASL score release will be inevitable, given this is the first year all schools and districts are held accountable under the new federal law.
- The media will most likely contact school districts with a high number of schools not making AYP, or they will contact districts with very few or no buildings on the list. Try to avoid commenting on the performance of other schools or districts.

- Avoid making excuses or comparisons to other districts. Stay focused on your plan for improving student learning and addressing areas of weaknesses as indicated by your WASL scores.
- Talk to reporters when they call. Remember that they have a job to do, but use the opportunity to explain to the media and your community about the opportunities and challenges NCLB presents.

### Be sure to note:

1. The new federal law requires **all** students reach higher performance levels on statewide, large scale assessments.
2. Both the state and federal education laws emphasize equal and high achievement for all. Under NCLB, all schools and districts must eliminate achievement gaps. This is absolutely in-line with Washington state's commitment to high standards. While it is an ambitious goal, it is the right goal.
3. Every state is required to define its own standards, testing requirements and AYP targets within strict criteria that must be approved by the federal government. Washington will continue to use its own state standards and assessments.
4. Adequate Yearly Progress will help us further target schools that are in need of assistance.
5. As with any new legislation that is sweeping and complex, we have confidence that continued adjustments and refinements will be made to the new federal law in some areas that still remain unclear, including requirements for special needs students and English Language Learners.
6. AYP reports are one more added source of information to provide a more complete picture of student learning.
7. We intend to make progress – not excuses – but we need resources, particularly in under-performing schools, to overcome challenges.
8. We invite the media, parents and the community to visit our schools and see what our students are learning. And we encourage them to work with us as we continually improve our schools.

## Communication Tips for Principals

### A note about language

When speaking with parents, community members and the media, remember that **THERE ARE NO FAILING SCHOOLS**. This is NOT official language being used by anyone at the state or federal level, and every effort needs to be made to correct the use of this language by other educators, members of the media, community leaders and parents. The schools “on the list” are those “in need of improvement.” Do not repeat the term “failing schools” back in responses to questions about “failing schools;” this reinforces the negative language.

### Be proactive in your communication

Here are ways you can be proactive in your communication with staff, parents and community leaders about the new federal law:

- Explain that the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) list of schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for at least two consecutive years is a list of schools that need improvement.
- Tell school staff, students, parents and community leaders whether or not your building(s) expect(s) to be on the list of schools in need of improvement **BEFORE** they read about it in the paper or see it on TV.
- Tell your school's story **BEFORE** the media does through building newsletters, Web sites, small group meetings with parents, staff and community leaders. Be sure to mention specific things your staff, parents and community can do to help improve student learning.
- Principals may want to create one-page written statements (your school's story) that can be approved by the superintendent in advance of the released information about AYP. This statement can be shared with staff, parents and community leaders. It can also be included in building newsletters. If approved, you can also share this information with local media.
- Principals may want to craft at least three key points they want people to remember about the school's data. Ask yourself: “What's the message here? How are we doing?” Make sure these messages are clear, concise and honest, but don't point blame at students or staff.
- Do not refer to your school or any others as “failing.” The schools on the list are schools “that need improvement.”
- Remember to explain these reports to ALL school staff members, including school administrative staff, bus drivers, custodians and food service workers. Local residents will seek out the opinions and knowledge of school staff at local grocery stores, churches, community events, parties and other informal settings.
- Clearly communicate with your staff, parents and community the content areas (reading/math) and the student sub-groups for which you did not meet AYP and then describe your plan for improving student achievement in these areas.
- Meet with staff to brainstorm a list of specific things staff are doing or can do to help improve student achievement. Have your school improvement team send the list with an encouraging memo to all staff members. Every member of your school staff may want to sign this list showing their commitment to improving student achievement. This list can be shared in district newsletters or be posted within the school building. Revisit the list at staff meetings.
- Meet with parents to review parental involvement policies (Title I schools) and brainstorm a list of specific things parents can do to help improve student achievement. Have your parental advisory board or PTA sign this list and distribute it to other parents. Ask this same group to revisit the list and come up with ways to encourage parental involvement.
- Principals may want to identify and meet with key members of the neighborhood in which their school building is located. Brainstorm a list of things neighbors can do to help. Ask one leader to spearhead this community group to ensure that action is taken.

# Questions and Answers for School Leaders

### Media coverage of AYP

The media often cover stories in terms of extremes (i.e. the highest, the lowest, the most, the least). That said, the media will most likely contact schools and districts with a very high number of schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). They will also emphasize schools that have very few or no buildings on the list. Superintendents, principals and school board members may be called upon to respond to questions about why their school(s) or district did not make AYP or are identified for improvement.

### Possible questions from the media

**Q: Are you aware that, because of the federal law, XX number of schools have been identified in your district as “failing”? What’s your reaction to this?**

A: I am familiar with the schools identified in need of improvement. I am working with my board/superintendent/principals to identify and address the needs in these schools/district. Reading and mathematics are the cornerstones of any education, and we must find ways to help all of our students succeed in these subjects.

**Q: Why does your school district have XX buildings in need of improvement when XX school district has none/many? Why did your school/district do so much better/worse than XX school/district?**

A: I only have first-hand knowledge of my own school/district. At this time, I think it’s important for me to focus on the needs of the students and staff in this district and find ways to help them meet their needs.

**Q: How have your parents reacted to news that several of your buildings are failing?**

A: Our parents have always been concerned about student growth and learning, even before the use of AYP to chart school/district progress. We continue to welcome their input and questions. We count on parental support and involvement. It’s a critical part of the school improvement process.

**Q: Your school district has no buildings identified on the list of failing schools. Why are you doing so much better?**

A: Every district faces its own unique challenges and issues. Our district, like every district in this state, is working hard to do the very best for all children.

**Q: What changes will you be making as a result of the AYP information?**

A: (Here you can provide an overview of current and planned initiatives, noting improvement strategies that are underway: “Our district has already been heavily involved with school improvement strategies and that focus will become even stronger within school buildings that did not meet AYP goals.”)

**Q: How will you respond to parents who want to know why your building needs improvement?**

A: We are making every effort to communicate with parents and community members about the programs we have in place to address student learning needs. We will also be trying some new approaches to help target students who may need additional support. We plan to communicate this information in a variety of ways, including through newsletters, parent conferences, open house events and periodic letters home.

**Q: Will you be making any staff changes as a result of this information?**

A: We will continue to base our staffing decisions on student needs, budget issues and a variety of data we have gathered.

**Q: Your district just passed a large measure to pay for your new facility/facility improvements. What will you say to your community now that you have failing schools?**

A: We recognize we have (a) school building(s) in need of improvement based on AYP criteria. We also know that the technology improvements, better heating and ventilation systems and new state of the art classrooms will have a positive impact on student achievement. The community’s funding for this measure is a critical part of our overall improvement process.

## Tough Q&A

**Q: *Why are so many more of Washington schools failing when we have been at education reform for the last 10 years? What does that say about our reform efforts in this state?***

A: The increase in the number of schools identified as not meeting AYP or “in need of improvement” has to do with the changes in the federal law, “No Child Left Behind (NCLB).” The new requirements pinpoint some learning challenges that schools must address when the assessment data is reported. Some schools’ learning challenges involve students who are in special education programs or students who are still learning English. Other schools have more severe learning challenges that cut across several groups of students. It is up to schools, districts, communities and the state to work together to figure out how to reach these students. We believe that all students, given appropriate time, assistance and resources, can meet the standards.

**Q: *People complain that our students are already over-tested. Won’t the new assessments under NCLB just make this worse?***

A: WASL testing takes approximately 2 weeks a year. Starting in 2005-06, annual WASL assessments will be in place for grades 3-8 and 10. Schools, districts and the state should look carefully at other assessments to determine what is essential and what can be eliminated to remove redundancies.

**Q: *Is it realistic to have all students at standard by 2014?***

A: We won’t know until we try. This is a tough and ambitious goal, but it is the right thing to target: all children learning at high levels. Our challenge in this next decade of reform, and especially under NCLB, will be to ensure that schools’ successes and best practices are shared more broadly and in a more systematic way.

**Q: *The state just made big cuts to education this last legislative session while the demands on schools are going up dramatically under NCLB. Isn’t this a train wreck waiting to happen?***

A: Washington received more than \$493 million in federal education funding in Fiscal Year 2002-2003 and expects to receive \$543 million in 2003-2004—an increase of over \$50 million. It’s true that schools are being asked to do more, and though there are increases, there is not enough to support all the needs. We need to make the best use of the funding that is provided and continue to target the learning needs unique to every student, school, and district.

**Q: *Is it realistic to have students with special needs and English Language Learning students judged to the same standard as other students?***

A: For too long, our system set different standards for different students. Now, the system expects the same of all students. What varies is *how* the students are taught and the *extra time* that students may need to achieve. Special education students and English language learners may need extra time and supports. Some special education students also need different testing formats and accommodations, and our system provides that, too. We need to ensure that NCLB has flexibility for students with special needs based on their IEPs. However, it is very important that they be included in the accountability system in an appropriate way.

**Q: *Are schools penalized if they have high levels of student turnover?***

A: No. The law appropriately recognizes that schools can only reach the students they have been teaching consistently. So while virtually all students are tested and their scores are reported, only those students who have been continuously enrolled since October 1 are included each year in the school’s AYP calculations.

**Q: *Isn’t labeling these schools “in need of improvement” just a word game to save face? Why don’t you call a failure a failure?***

A: Schools identified in need of improvement are just that – schools in need of improvement. That means we need to do a better job targeting resources and assistance to the students and staff in those schools to help them succeed. Calling them a failure doesn’t improve the situation. Greater community and parental involvement of students and staff will help support their efforts to improve student learning.





# Words and Terms to Know

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) uses words and terms that might be unfamiliar to parents and community groups. Using a number of sources, this glossary has been developed to increase parent and community understanding of the legal and educational terminology used in the act. Terms that refer to Washington state's own school reform initiatives also are included. Special thanks to the Public Education Network for use of this glossary. Sources consulted in compiling this glossary are:

- Education Week
- National Center for Research on Evaluation
- National Coalition of Education Activists (NCEA)
- National Center for Research on Evaluation Standards and Student Testing (CREST)
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
- Partnership for Learning (PFL)
- Public Education Network (PEN)
- U.S. Department of Education (USDOE)

### Academic standards

The information, ideas, and facts students are supposed to learn in a particular grade comprise academic standards. In Washington state, these are known as the Essential Academic Learning Requirements or EALRs.

### Accountability System

Each state sets academic standards for what every child should know and learn. Academic achievement is measured every year. The results of these annual tests are reported to the public. (U.S. Department of Education)

### Achievement Gap

Differences in academic performance among groups are often identified racially, ethnically, and by income levels. In the United States, white students tend to outperform children of color; and wealthier students often do better than poorer ones, creating an "achievement gap." (NCEA)

### Achievement Levels

Student achievement on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is reported by achievement level. These achievement levels are also consistent with definitions under NCLB. There are four achievement levels:

**Level 1/ Below Basic** — Students performing at this level do not demonstrate sufficient mastery of skills and abilities in the subject.

**Level 2/ Basic** — Students performing at this level demonstrate inconsistent mastery of skills and abilities in the subject.

**Level 3/ Proficient** — Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate mastery of skills and abilities in the subject.

**Level 4/ Advanced** — Students performing at this level exceed the standard in the subject beyond that required to be proficient.

### Adequate yearly progress

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year. All students must reach "proficiency" by 2014 under NCLB. (U.S. Department of Education)

### Alignment

State standards are "aligned" to classroom instruction and the WASL to ensure that students have actually been taught the material they are tested on. This alignment process provides a more accurate picture of student learning.

### Alternative assessments

Alternative assessments are ways, other than standardized tests, to get information about what students know and where they may need help, such as oral reports or discussions, projects, performances, and experiments. (NCEA)

**Alternative certification**

Most teachers are required to have both a four-year college degree in education and state certification before they can enter the classroom. No Child Left Behind encourages states to offer other methods of qualification that allow talented individuals to teach subjects they have expertise in. (U.S. Department of Education)

**Assessments**

Assessment is another word for “test.”

**Benchmark**

A benchmark is a detailed description of a specific level of student achievement expected of students at particular ages, grades or developmental levels. Benchmarks are often represented by samples of student work. A set of benchmarks can be used as checkpoints to monitor progress in meeting performance goals within and across grade levels. (CRESST)

**Bilingual education**

Bilingual education is an in-school program for students whose first language is not English or who have Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Bilingual education provides instruction to help the student develop their English language skills and, until the student has gained greater fluency skills in English, subject area instruction in the student’s native language. (NCEA)

**Certificate of Mastery**

The Certificate of Mastery (CoM) will serve as evidence that Washington students have achieved the state’s Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). The class of 2008 will be the first class required to demonstrate achievement of the reading, writing and math standards as measured by the 10th-grade WASL as part of Washington’s diploma requirements. Science will be added in 2010. Students will also have to meet local school and district graduation requirements. (OSPI and PFL)

**Classroom-based assessments**

The most frequently used assessments are classroom tests prepared by teachers. These can take the form of brief, informal quizzes or more formal – midterms or final exams – that cover a longer period of class work.

**Corrective action**

When a school or school district – which is in need of improvement – continues not making AYP ( Step 3 for schools and Step1 for districts), it will be

subject to a corrective action plan. The plan will include resources to improve teaching, administration or curriculum. If the school or school district does not improve, then the federal law authorizes additional changes to ensure improvement. (U.S. Department of Education)

**Criterion-referenced tests**

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is an example of a criterion-referenced test. These tests measure students’ performance against set standards. The WASL, for example, measures whether students have learned the specific skills, concepts, facts and ideas found in Washington’s academic standards (the EALRs), not how they have performed against fellow Washington students or their peers nationally. By using a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer and essay questions, the WASL allows for a deeper assessment of important skills and knowledge found in the state standards. (See also *norm-referenced tests*.) (OSPI and PFL)

**Curriculum alignment**

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning is designed to measure student performance in meeting the state’s academic standards, as described in the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRS). Washington schools have undergone a process to align their curriculum to the state standards so that students are actually taught the material they will be tested on.

**Disaggregated data**

To “disaggregate” means to separate a whole into its parts. In education, this term means that test results are sorted by groups of students who are economically disadvantaged, from racial and ethnic minority groups, have disabilities, or have limited English fluency. This practice allows parents and teachers to see more than just the average score for their child’s school. Instead, parents and teachers can see how each student group is performing. (U.S. Department of Education)

**Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRS)**

Washington’s academic standards, known as the Essential Academic Learning Requirements, describe the specific knowledge and skills in various core subjects that students are expected to learn as they progress through school. Washington teachers were the primary developers of these standards.



### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

This is the primary federal law affecting K–12 education. ESEA is reauthorized by Congress every six years. It is also referred to as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, the name given to the law by the Bush administration when the law was reauthorized in January 2002. (U.S. Department of Education)

### **Highly qualified teacher**

The new federal education law defines a “highly qualified teacher” as one who has obtained full state teacher certification **or** has passed the state teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the state; holds a minimum of a bachelor’s degree; and has demonstrated subject area competence in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher instructs. (NCLB)

### **Inclusion**

Inclusion is the practice of placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Also known as mainstreaming. (NCEA)

### **Instruction**

Instruction refers to the methods teachers use to instruct students. Common methods are lecture, discussion, hands-on activities, exercise, experiment, role-playing, small group work, and writing assessments. The most effective teachers use many methods because not all are effective with all students. (NCEA)

### **Limited English Proficient**

Limited English Proficient refers to students for whom English is a second language and who are not at (LEP) grade level in reading and writing English. (NCEA)

### **Local education agency (LEA)**

An LEA is a term used by the federal education law to describe a public board of education or other public authority within a state that maintains administrative control of public elementary or secondary schools in a city, county, school district, or other political subdivision. The Kent School District is an example of an LEA. (U.S. Department of Education)

### **Norm-referenced tests**

The goal of these tests is to learn how students compare to each other by measuring their scores against an average national score. Norm-referenced tests are scores using a national curve in which half of the students receive a score above 50 percent

and half below. The comparison group is called the “norm,” explaining why these tests are generally comprised of multiple choice and/or true-false questions. Norm-reference tests such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills are used in Washington state in addition to the WASL, a criterion-referenced test.

### **Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)**

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is the Washington state department of education. It is the primary state agency charged with overseeing K-12 education, led by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Terry Bergeson.

### **Opportunity to Learn**

A term used to describe efforts to close the learning gap between the most and the least privileged students, ensuring all students and staff have the resources they need to be successful at high levels. (PEN and NCEA)

### **Parental involvement**

Parental involvement is the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving students’ academic learning and other school activities. The involvement includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in their child’s learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees. (NCLB)

### **Performance standards**

Performance standards represent what a student is supposed to know and do by the end of a particular grade. (NCEA)

### **Public engagement**

Public engagement is the sustained and active involvement of parents, community members, and taxpayers in the improvement of schooling and efforts to reform schools. (Education Week)

### **Public school choice**

Under NCLB Title I, schools that have not made AYP for two consecutive years must inform parents of their options for transferring their child to a school that is not in school improvement. Schools must use a portion of their Title I funds to pay for transportation costs. (U.S. Department of Education)

### **School improvement plan (SIPs)**

As part of Washington’s education reform efforts, schools must create school improvement plans

describing their vision for raising student achievement. These improvement plans use assessment data to identify strengths and weaknesses, helping schools set goals and priorities such as focusing on developing strong reading skills in kindergarten through third grade or boosting scores in math. Research shows success does not just happen. Schools that have shown significant gains on the WASL have a clear plan for improvement and target their resources to achieve their goals. These plans also help schools communicate to parents and community members their vision for raising student achievement and how they can best support these efforts. (OSPI)

### **Schoolwide programs**

Schoolwide programs use Title I money to support comprehensive school improvement efforts and help all students, particularly low-achieving and at-risk students, meet state standards at particular schools. To qualify as a Title I schoolwide program, at least 40 percent of a school's students must be considered low-income. Schoolwide programs provide Title I services/support to all of the children in the school, regardless of income level. (PEN)

### **Scientifically based research**

Research that involves the application of rigorous, systemic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to educational activities/programs. (U.S. Department of Education)

### **State education agency (SEA)**

Under the federal education law, the state education agency is the agency primarily responsible for the supervision of a state's public elementary and secondary schools. In Washington state, it is the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

### **Supplemental services**

Students from low-income families who are attending schools that have been identified as "in need of school improvement" for at least three years will be eligible to receive outside tutoring or academic assistance. Parents can choose the appropriate services for their child from a list of state-approved providers. The school district will be required to use a portion of its Title I funds to pay for the services. (U.S. Department of Education)

### **Title I**

Title I is the nation's largest federal education program, with a 2002 funding level of \$10.4 billion. Created in 1965 during the War on Poverty, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as the No Child Left Behind Act) provides remedial education programs to poor and disadvantaged children in nearly every school district in the country. Amendments to the law in 1994 were designed to tie the program to schoolwide and districtwide reforms based on challenging academic standards. Title I was formerly known as "Chapter 1." (Education Week)

### **Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)**

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning is a criterion-referenced test that measures students' performance against set standards. The WASL, for example, measures whether students have learned the specific skills, concepts, facts and ideas found in Washington's academic standards (EALRs), not how they have performed against fellow Washington students or their peers nationally. By using a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer and essay questions, the WASL allows for a deeper assessment of important skills and knowledge found in the state standards. (OSPI)